

Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County (CLC)
Testimony on Senate Bill 912
Office of Early Childhood Budget

“Expands the degrees allowable to meet early childhood staff qualifications to regionally accredited institutions”

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Sanchez, Senator Bye, Senator Somers, Representative Lavielle, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in regard to my role as CEO at Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County (CLC). CLC is the third largest non-profit childcare agency in the State of Connecticut. CLC serves children 6 weeks to 5 years old in state funded and Head Start programs for the City of Stamford and surrounding communities of lower Fairfield County. In order to meet the highest of standards in Early Childhood Education and receive maximum reimbursement rates our programs are required to be either accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or Head Start Approved. In order to be NAEYC Accredited or Head Start Approved, our programs are reviewed and approved with national and internationally recognized criteria for best practices which includes staff qualifications.

Since the inception of the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) staff qualification mandates, CLC has experienced enormous burdens recruiting and retaining our teacher applicant pool. The mandates contain isolating, exclusionary properties, most profoundly, the criteria that defines a qualified staff member as one who (1) graduates from an OEC approved college/university, or (2) demonstrates competency with a Connecticut Early Childhood Teacher Certification (ECTC) through an Individual Review Route.

In order to be a Qualified Staff Member (QSM) in a state-funded Early Childhood program an individual must graduate from one of five (5) OEC approved Bachelor Degree programs. The closest brick and mortar institution is fifty two (52) miles from Stamford, leaving the only feasible option: a choice of two *online* programs. It is also important to mention that these approved institutions' programs are only valid for those who graduated from 2012-2013, onward, creating an “aged out” population of those with *valuable* experience who graduated prior to 2012. The OEC has asserted more institutions would be approved, however since 2013, not one additional institution has been approved.

CLC supports recognizing ***regionally accredited*** institutions of higher education. The OEC will contend it cannot approve out of state programs, however, this argument is erroneous.

Regionally accredited institutions have already gone through the rigorous process of demonstrating the competence of the programs they offer. In addition, NAEYC, the nation's premier association for Early Childhood Professionals, already identifies and accepts ***regionally accredited*** institutions and broader areas of study for its rigorous accreditation process; in other words, the OEC identifying approved Bachelor programs is completely a discretionary constraint. Further, the state registry, Connecticut Charts-A- Course currently recognizes NAEYC's position by assigning a “Career Ladder” level to Early Childhood Professionals based on whether an earned degree is from a ***regionally accredited*** institution rather than the OEC's exclusive definition of an approved institution.

Recognizing the exclusivity of the approved institution list, the OEC created the Individual Review Route (IRR), an alternative pathway to obtain a Connecticut Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) with two (2) pathways:

- *Transcript Review Process:* evaluates course syllabi and descriptions to determine competency. The OEC reports that only **seven** individuals to date have been awarded the ECTC through this route.
- *Portfolio Review Process:* requires written rationales of competency and scored on a rubric. The In 2013 when the ECTC was first awarded, it was anticipated a total of 1500 would be awarded by the end of 2015. For the 2013/2014 year, 194 ECTCs were awarded (129 through approved colleges, only 65 through the IRR). For the 2014/2015 the OEC reported “over 250 credentials to date” were obtained. Please note these numbers do not break down the Associate degree level vs. Bachelor degree level ECTC.

Both pathways of the IRR have obstacles from accessibility to required documentation to one-dimensional evaluation of teacher effectiveness, accountability, and competence.

The current legislation places sanctions solely on ***state funded*** early childhood programs; private, corporate, and Board of Education programs can hire highly qualified teachers with degrees from regionally accredited universities. It is difficult enough for the early childhood programs to compete with the Public School systems on hiring qualified staff without the need to add on extra burdensome obligations. Board of Education programs are able to offer considerably higher compensation packages and more comprehensive benefits; this places the human resources of state funded Early Childhood programs in direct competition with the overall resources of public school districts.

While the intention of the mandates was to increase the number of highly qualified teachers, however it does the **opposite**. It limits the pool of applicants and discounts graduates from premier Early Childhood programs at prestigious universities such as Bank Street College and Columbia Teacher’s College. Accessibility to higher education options for are limited for childcare agencies in Fairfield County. CLC relies on highly qualified applicants from the surrounding area, particularly, New York. Manhattanville College, for example, offers regionally accredited and *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited* Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programs in Early Childhood Education and is only 13 miles away, however, CLC is unable to utilize this nationally recognized resource, because it is not an OEC approved college. How does an example like this net quality standards and results in Early Childhood programs?

The OEC’s policy is stark in comparison to the national standards set forth by NAEYC in both options and diversity of approved colleges, and the breadth of related fields of study which in turn only narrows the quality, diversity, and experience of dedicated professionals. Recognition of regionally accredited universities prevents the redundancy of state funded programs that also must be NAEYC accredited and relieves the economic burdens of state funded programs that compete for teacher applicant pools in an already financially stressed environment. In an economic environment that begs for job growth, it is absurd that CLC has open teaching positions available and cannot offer these positions to qualified professionals based on unnecessary and duplicative OEC restrictions.

CLC requests the following modifications to the proposed language:

Section 1, Subparagraph (B): “provided such bachelor’s degree program is approved by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or the Office of Higher Education [and the Office of Early Childhood]” and regionally accredited.

Section 1, Subparagraph (C): “provided such bachelor’s degree program is approved by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or the Office of Higher Education [and the Office of Early Childhood”] and regionally accredited.

“Section 1, Subparagraph (B): “...or (III) a bachelor’s degree and twelve credits or more in early childhood education or child development [or an advanced degree in early childhood education or child development, as determined by the commissioner or the president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, after consultation with the commissioner, from an institution of higher education accredited] **approved** by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or Office of Higher Education, and regionally accredited...”

“Section 1, Subparagraph (C): “...or (iii) a bachelor’s degree and twelve credits or more in early childhood education or child development [or an advanced degree in early childhood education or child development, as determined by the commissioner or the president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, after consultation with the commissioner, from an institution of higher education accredited] (I) **approved** by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or Office of Higher Education, and (II) regionally accredited...”

I strongly urge you to support **Senate Bill 912** with the above listed modifications. Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to address this matter.

Respectfully Submitted,

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